

Professional Learning Communities

at Work in Your School

What Does It Look Like If We Really Mean It?

Teachers work on collaborative teams to:

Determine essential learnings....

No longer will it be up to the individual teacher to determine what state and district standards mean and the relative importance of each. Collaboratively, teams will investigate, discuss, and determine the most essential learnings for all students based on state and district curriculum. The result is teachers teaching less content at a greater depth and in more meaningful ways (Eaker, 2009).

Create common formative and summative assessments....

After essential learnings are agreed upon, teachers work together to determine appropriate pacing guides and create common formative and summative assessments designed to monitor the learning of individual students on a timely basis. Formative assessments are the practice students participate in to learn and demonstrate achievement on summative assessments. Think of formative assessments as practice before the game. Athletes receive regular feedback during practice all week so they may have the opportunity to play at their highest level during the summative assessment which is the game.

Develop a schoolwide systematic plan for intervention....

If students are struggling academically, it will no longer be up to the individual teacher to decide if and how students will be given additional time and support. Regardless of the teacher a student is assigned to, as system will be in place to ensure each and every student who needs it will be provided additional assistance. Support will be provided **within the school day**, in a **timely** manner, and students will be **directed**, not invited, to receive support (DuFour, 2009).

The criteria for assessing the significance of a particular standard:

- Does it have endurance?
- Does it have leverage?
- Does it develop readiness for the next level of learning?

-Douglas Reeves

"Wouldn't we filter all decisions through the lens of their probable impact on learning?"

-Robert Eaker

Teachers utilize collaborative teams effectively by:

Engaging in deep, substantive discussions focused on student learning....

What we collaborate about is very important. The purpose of our collaborative teams is to impact professional practice in order to improve our individual and collective results and ultimately improve student learning. We must be willing to discuss practices that may be hindering student learning. We will challenge our assumptions about practices such as averaging grades, the use of zeros, the ability for students to make-up work, and the use of worksheets and homework (Brown, 2009).

Working interdependently....there is an "I" in team...

A group of people working together does not make them a team. Collaborative teams work "together **interdependently** to achieve a common goal for which they are mutually accountable. It is only when educators need each other, rely on each other, and depend on each other to achieve the shared goal of helping more students learn at higher levels that they are operating as a team" (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, 2008). With mutually agreed upon group norms, a common language, and protocols for meaningful and relevant collaboration we have the ability to grow as professionals in ways traditional professional development has never provided. Our shared knowledge of effective practices and continued focus on student learning will increase our ability to achieve our goals.

"When a school becomes a professional learning community everything in the school looks different than before."

-Andy Hargreaves

Teachers focus on results by:

Being data driven....

Using data from common formative assessments can improve student learning and "inform and improve the practice of both individual teachers and teams of teachers" (Dufour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2008). Data from common assessments provides a basis for comparison which is necessary to understand results in their context and provide not just data but information. Teachers can not only identify which students are struggling and provide intervention strategies to improve learning but they can also use data to reflect on their own teaching practices. As Dufour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) wrote, "When teachers are presented with clear evidence their students are not becoming proficient in skills they agreed were essential, as measured on an assessment they helped to create, and that similar students taught by their colleagues have demonstrated proficiency on the same assessment, they are open to exploring new practices" (p.214).

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What's the Big Idea, Anyway?

How About 3 Big Ideas!

1

Focus on Learning

The fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure high levels of learning for all students. This focus on learning translates into four critical questions that drive the daily work of the school. In PLCs, educators demonstrate their commitment to helping all students learn by working collaboratively to address the following critical questions:

- What do we want students to learn? What should each student know and be able to do as a result of each unit, grade level, and/or course?
- How will we know if they have learned? Are we monitoring each student's learning on a timely basis?
- What will we do if they don't learn? What systematic process is in place to provide additional time and support for students who are experiencing difficulty?
- What will we do if they already know it?

2

Build a Collaborative Team

- No school can help all students achieve at high levels if teachers work in isolation.
- Schools improve when teachers are given the time and support to work together to clarify essential student learning, develop common assessments for learning, analyze evidence of student learning, and use that evidence to learn from one another.

3

Focus on Results

- PLCs measure their effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions.
- All programs, policies, and practices are continually assessed on the basis of their impact on student learning.
- All staff members receive relevant and timely information on their effectiveness in achieving intended results.

Driving Questions for PLC's

What are the essential outcomes that we expect students to learn?



What assessment will we use to determine if the students have learned?



How will we intervene when students do not learn or learn more than anticipated?

References

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